



Photos by STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Dr. Stephen Wu and Clark College dental hygiene student Lauren Ferran — among 75 volunteers participating in a senior project hatched by another Clark College student — work on Share House staff member Jim Miles' teeth Saturday. The 45 homeless men who received free dental care were selected through screenings for the magnitude of their need.

An offering with teeth

Dental hygiene student directs her senior project to an area of great need

By LAURA McVICKER
Columbian staff writer

The discomfort of fillings and extractions didn't seem to bother the patients at Clark College's dental clinic on Saturday.

They gladly sat down on vinyl chairs, opened wide and let dental hygienists and dentists look around, drill and fill cavities.

The alternative? Well, Romy Bugg, 45, doesn't want to talk about that.

"A day of pain is better than months of pain," Bugg said, before being escorted to one of the dental chairs at the clinic.

Bugg, an uninsured resident of Vancouver's Share House, doesn't have regular dental or medical care, receiving most treatment at hospital emergency rooms. The bills are often too much. But so is the pain.

He was among 45 homeless men benefitting from Saturday's free dental day, organized by Clark College dental hygiene student Audrey Herman as part of her senior project.

Herman's class was asked to hatch a public health project aimed to people in critical need of dental care — low-income children or young pregnant women, for instance.

The 26-year-old picked homeless men.

"Women and children get the most privilege — these guys get overlooked,"



Wu checks X-rays. Clark College student Audrey Herman, 26, planned the event because there are other programs to help women and children.

she said. "Their population has the greatest need and the least amount of service."

That's because much of the community's free dental services, such as February's annual dental health day put on by Ronald McDonald House Charities, are aimed at children. But homeless men, who often lack nutrition and the personal care to protect themselves from cavities, need it just as much, she said.

"Not many people go and offer things to them," Herman said. "Most of them are in pain when they walk in. And some of them have lived with it for so long."

In previous years, dental students have done similar projects geared toward homeless men. But this is the first year a project for that demographic has been this wide-scale, Herman said. Last year, only a dozen men received

treatment from 20 volunteers.

This year, 75 volunteers, including Herman's fellow dental students and six local dentists, took on the project. The Blind Onion restaurant, Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church and the Clark College Foundation donated lunch.

Herman said she got the word out to classmates and dentists through a mass e-mail, and she and volunteers performed initial screenings at Share House. Those with the most need for the dental treatment were invited to the clinic Saturday, she said.

One of the volunteers, Dentist Stephen Wu, said he felt compelled to help because of the heart of the project.

"In this day and age, what we really need to do is help people who can't help themselves," he said.

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